

Intro

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The past decade has witnessed significant changes in media environments worldwide, prompted by the advent of web 2.0, the unprecedented spread of mobile phones, and new ways of exploiting old technologies. Rural areas in the Global South are experiencing rapid transition from periods of limited mediated access to the 'outside world' to a new multi-faceted mediated access due to the sudden and often simultaneous introduction of private and community radio, cable and satellite television, and high mobile phone penetration. Meanwhile, in urban settings from Kathmandu to New York, people have access to diverse forms of 'hypermedia spaces' (Kraidy, 2007), while an explosion of electronic mass media and new ICT, especially social media, have created new forms of social and political communication.

The reasons for these dramatic changes in media environments are manifold and due to political, economic, social, cultural, and technological factors. In Nepal, as in many other countries in the Global South, the government controlled the airwaves until 1998, when a handful of local commercial and community radio stations were introduced. This was, however, followed by the government impeding the spread of this readily available technology with a restrictive licensing policy as well as various forms of harassment. In 2006, after significant pressure from civil society and international donors, the government opened up the airwaves. Over 200 community radio stations have been launched as of 2012. Community radio in Nepal is now considered a significant political, social, and cultural force and is fundamentally changing the power structure of the state relative to civil society.

The market has simultaneously been the driving force behind an exceptional expansion of mobile phone use and the introduction of cable and satellite television. Urban areas in particular have seen the emergence of a wide range of commercial media and the appearance of the internet and social media. These changes in the media environment have caused a continual reconfiguring of the power relationships between state, market, and civil society and have reformulated existing patterns of communication, creating new spaces for public debate. Nepalese community radio provides farmers and marginalised people unprecedented access to information on local and national governance, rights and development issues, and local culture. In some cases, community radio even empowers previously marginalised individuals to make their voices heard and participate in the democratic process. At the same time, however, the discursive practices of community radio reinforce existing local power structures, exclude marginalised groups, and maintain ethnic rivalry.

Many in remote rural villages in the Global South are now able for the first time to access 50 or more transnational television stations. This proves a mind-expanding experience, regardless of whether people are watching Arabic language pan-Arabic news channels (for example, Al Jazeera) that are not controlled by local regimes or are able to finally give themselves over to the allure of Nollywood or Bollywood movies. Exposure to transnational television necessarily creates a distorted mediated perception of the otherwise-limited accessible World, yet no thorough studies have yet been undertaken of the complex impact that this exposure has on socio-cultural and political engagement as well as audience's future aspirations.

Widespread urban access to the internet and social media has not only fundamentally challenged sender-dominated forms of mass media but has also changed the perception of time and space and the global-local nexus. The advent of web 2.0 has conditioned new processes of local and global civic engagement and social movements such as oppositional diaspora media in Burma (www.dvb.no), crowdsourcing in Kenya's 2008 post-election violence (www.usahidi.com), the globally hyped use of social media in Tunisia and Egypt, and various forms of e-mobilisation (www.avaaz.org) and viral campaigning. New ICT has furthermore created new avenues for the state and civil society to exploit C4D (communication for development), mHealth, and digital empowerment and e-participation in the context of democratisation processes and communication for social change initiatives. These 'new' developments, however, not only run the risk of being interpreted in overly optimistic and techno-centric terms but also of diverting attention from the continued relevance of the traditional mass media, which has demonstrated significant endurance and still dominates most of the reconfigured media environments.

These new developments are comprehensive, complex, and multi-faceted: Changes in everyday communication patterns challenge and alter existing social relations at individual, household, and local community levels, and at a societal level, we can identify emerging relations between state, market, and civil society as well as between the local and the global. To fully comprehend the impact of these new developments, it is important both

to conduct contextually bounded empirical studies and to develop new theories. This issue of *MedieKultur* aims to present a wide range of studies addressing these aforementioned issues.

The thematic section's first contribution, by Linje Manyozo, Goretti N. Linda, and Claudia Lopes, contributes to current scholarship on community radio and development by examining the management of six community radio networks in Mali, Mozambique, and Uganda. While focusing on "traditional" mass media and its continued communicative importance on the African continent, Manyozo et al. take a political economy perspective in exploring the competing models and functions of radio management committees and their significance in achieving social, institutional, financial, and ideological sustainability. The authors, however, also question the convergence of ICT and community radio in general and how new ICTs influence how management committees approach their work, with a specific focus on gendered digital divides and shifting balances of power. The article concludes with reference to a larger research project, "The Implication of ICTs in the Political Economy of Community Radio Broadcasting in Africa", and surprisingly asserts that the study found no clear evidence to suggest that ICT availability has influenced how management committees work.

Anastasia Kavada explores the role of social media platforms in transnational activism by examining the case of *Avaaz.org*, an international advocacy organisation that aims to bring people-powered politics into global decision-making. In particular, Kavada investigates the advocacy organisation's communicative presence on four specific web platforms: The organisation's own website, Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace, a combined presence that represents a new synergetic approach to internet campaigning and transnational activism. Exploring the affordances of each platform for identity-building, bonding, and engagement, the author's thorough case study deepens our understanding of new agents in advocacy campaigns: Networked second-generation activist organisations that are distinctly multi-issue and collaborate for their transnational campaigns with a wide range of civil society organisations and (new) social movements. Kavada's findings show that *Avaaz.org*'s presence on several web-based platforms enables the construction of a communicative interaction that is complex, multimedia, and dynamic, including features that offer real-time or regularly updated information. The "design" of the different platforms affords a special balance between the individual and the collective, the personal and the organisational.

In their empirically and conceptually challenging contribution, Teke Ngomba and Jacob Thorsen explore the dynamics and challenges of civic participation processes. As they convincingly argue, communication for social change scholars aiming to study the deliberation and empowerment of disenfranchised and marginalised populations in the Global South should pay more attention to (1) the quality of citizens' self-perceptions in relation to their local milieu; (2) inter-citizen perceptions and relationships at the local level, and (3) the attendant consequences on citizens' sense of efficacy. With this in mind, Ngomba

and Thorsen apply Floya Anthias's concept of narratives of location and positionality, demonstrating this concept's heuristic vitality by discussing local discourses on positionality in Nepal and Cameroon. They thereby respond to a need for deeper examination of the quality of inter-citizen perception and interaction at the local level, including how these processes affect participatory development, democracy, and communication for social change in the Global South. Bridging two empirical cases located on different continents, the authors nonetheless succeed in contributing to the development of a highly congruent theoretical and analytical framework. This framework provides a richer understanding of local social structures and the "prevalence of inherited social norms that may be working against horizontal dialogue and democratic participation" (Gumucio-Dragon, 2009: 456).

The core objective of Karin Wilkins' contribution is to question the frequently overtly optimistic and techno-centric understandings of a "bright future of digital media" in the context of the Arab spring and specifically Egypt's "half revolution". Discussing how the media landscape has contributed to this process of shifting political power in Egypt in a context of collective human action, mobilisation, and activist struggle, Wilkins rigorously argues that political engagement means more than just reliance on and use of a particular medium; the key issue in political resistance is power, not technology. Wilkins applies this critical perspective to her intriguing deconstruction of the application of a dominant Hollywood narrative in USA's media reporting on the Egyptian "revolution". As her analysis shows, this narrative not only tells a reductive tale of hero, victim, and villain but also privileges the role of social media as an anthropomorphic heroic sidekick. Wilkins concludes that, as of 2011, political resistance in Egypt has not been a Facebook revolution and that political engagement within Egypt is not simply a matter of television vs. social media, given that both communication systems are vulnerable to political restrictions and corporate decisions.

In their discussion of a "Visual Problem Appraisal" approach, Loes Witteveen and Rico Lie direct our attention towards a film-based learning environment strategy, which they argue holds the promise of enhancing analysis of complex issues and facilitating stakeholder dialogue and action planning. Witteveen and Lie take their point of departure in the assumption that, if properly conceptualised and designed, the outlined visualisation strategy is capable of unravelling and getting to grips with "wicked multi-stakeholder problems". Based on a number of empirical case studies, the authors' contribution describes the conditions for a Visual Problem Appraisal approach, contributing to the initiation of social dialogues by "creating positive friction". Although the outlined strategic approach provides psychological space for learning and dialogue, the authors emphasise the need for well thought-out facilitation. The validity of the assumption that the use of film in a learning environment could create a somewhat autonomous learning process whereby personal instruction is replaced by a mediated learning environment is meanwhile not confirmed.

Focussing on Nepal, Arul Chib, Faiz B. Mohd Irwan Law, and Muhammad Nazran Ahmad present the inspiring findings of their fieldwork-based study on healthcare service delivery in remote rural communities in this Himalayan country, which is counted among

the least developed in the world. With reference to their work in the field of mHealth studies, the authors question the oft-proposed benefits of mobile technologies on rural healthcare development. Their findings thus reveal that limited relevance and sharing of information, limited access due to individual ownership and low income, and ineffective training programmes are key barriers to the delivery of rural healthcare services. However, they also are able to pinpoint obvious spatio-temporal benefits reaped by community health workers as a result of the introduction of mobile solutions in rural healthcare, an example being improved micro-coordination of crucial tasks. The authors applaud such positive outcomes, well aware that mobile phone implementation for community health workers challenges the existing balance of social power between patients, health workers, and centralised hospitals. They thus demonstrate that existing social hierarchies can come under pressure in unique ways when mobile solutions are introduced to mobile health care.

In the final thematic contribution, Pradip Thomas explores the role of public sector software (PSS) in fostering an informed and proactive citizenry. Using the example of the emerging PSS movement in India, particularly the ICT literacy movement in Kerala, South India, Thomas argues that access to and use of free and open source software has the potential to empower communities. Theorising PSS in relation to the Risk Society and the Commons, this article argues that open standards can contribute to the construction of an “information commons” and provide innovative and creative solutions to the information deficits faced by dis-privileged communities in India and elsewhere. Thomas’ study stresses that this objective demands active alliances between the state and civil society, enabling the creation, production, and circulation of public sector software based on free and open source principles. While the (Indian) state is acknowledged to play an extraordinarily ambivalent role, balanced between acting as a protector of democracy and as democracy’s chief antagonist, the state is nevertheless ascribed a vital role in protecting the new digital commons, though sometimes in unexpected ways. Last but not least, this contribution explores the contestation of PSS by major private software companies, which stand to lose from public investment based on open standards.

In the open section, we are delighted to present two remarkable articles in Danish, one by Anne Scott Sørensen and one by Orla Vigsø.

Anne Scott Sørensen’s contribution, based on a qualitative study of Danish Facebook users, looks at social media from the perspective of mediatisation, exploring how social media promotes distinctive forms of network sociability and communication. Taking Jesper Tække’s statement on the fundamental communicative paradox observed in social media as her analytical point of departure, Sørensen identifies three “communicative dilemmas” inherent in self-(re)presentation, the uses of status notifications, and the social regulation of interpersonal communication on Facebook. On the basis of the analytical results of her empirical investigation, Sørensen contributes to an understanding that transcends the common argument that social media-based communication’s “insecure” nature, which is

seen as originating in the lack of a clearly defined community and a resulting delineation of meaning, goes hand in hand with the absence of implicit social regulation and a communicative ethic. Sørensen thus provides an evidence-based argument for the role that generically distinctive status notifications play in a performative self-representation that asserts an ethic of self-awareness and is grounded network sociability. This is despite such status notifications' apparent egocentric and superficial character.

In this study, inspired by George Lakoff (2002; 2009) and concerning political communication by the Danish People's Party, Orla Vigsø identifies the party's defining cluster of ideas and perceptions as conservative in the sense of a normative core family model built on "the strict father" ideal. Vigsø analytically combines this delineation with the argument that the Danish People's Party's extensive use of press releases to communicate its exceptionally homogenous perspective on politics is due to a set of moral imperatives. One of the thought-provoking results of the author's "ideological" critique is his well-argued rejection of the prevalent accusation that the right wing Danish People's Party is populist in the sense of taking a market-oriented voter appeasement strategy. As Vigsø seeks to demonstrate, the party's adherence to and expression of political positions based on moral attitudes places it somewhere midway in the spectrum between product-oriented and market-oriented political parties in Denmark. That is to say, Vigsø identifies the Danish People's Party as sales-oriented, to use Lees-Marshment's (2001) categorical terminology.

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